



The Road to Kenya

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Layton students on long-range fitness journey

LAYTON -- Every morning at 9:15, students in Diane Grisby's functional skills class can be found striding down the halls of Whitesides Elementary School.

For Grisby's 11 students, many of whom have physical disabilities, each lap they complete represents a small victory.

Since the end of September, Grisby's students have been participating in the school's Gold Medal Mile program. The entire school is trying to walk a total of 9,073 miles, or the distance to Kenya.

Grisby said when the program began, many in the school assumed her students would not participate.

"I was like, 'Oh yeah, we're doing it,'<2009>" she said.

And they have, even though it means some students are led down the hall by hand or pushed in their wheelchairs.

Each day, the students complete at least three laps, a distance equal to three-fourths of a mile.

So far, Grisby's class has walked 157 miles. In October, they placed fourth among all the school's classes for total miles walked.

Whiteside's Gold Medal program coordinator, Allison Downs, said she has been impressed by the students' performance.

"They're doing more than most classes," she said.

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Grisby said the exercise helps the students focus on their studies. If the class gets too rambunctious during the day,

sometimes Grisby leads them on another round of laps in the afternoon.

"They don't see it as a punishment," she said. "They think it is kind of fun, and it helps them settle down."

Student Katie King, 12, said she feels like she is in better shape since the program began. Parker Jorgensen, 8, said the laps give him a workout.

"It makes me a little bit tired, and I can feel my heart beating," he said.

The program has also boosted the students' morale.

"They love it," Grisby said. "It's great for them to see that they can do it, just like the other students."

Currently, her students have to get their exercise within the school's narrow hallways because many cannot manage walking on the uneven ground outside. Downs said the school is hoping to receive a grant or donation so they can build an outdoor track for the students to use.

If Whitesides Elementary students achieve their goal of "walking to Africa," Downs said the faculty hopes to reward them with a day at the zoo. They are also seeking funding to help cover the cost of chartering buses for the trip.

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